

much comfort from that. But the best thing that can happen for the Serbian people is if he were no longer President.

Mr. Blitzer. And you think that's realistic, that that could happen anytime soon?

The President. Well, I think that I shouldn't comment on that right now. But I think that there's—with the church leaders calling for him to step down, with the people in the opposition in Serbia calling for him to do so, and with the commitment we have made as allies to support humanitarian aid to the Serbs but no reconstruction aid as long as he's there, I think that's a pretty clear message.

Undermining Milosevic's Regime

Mr. Blitzer. You know about the reports that you've signed an intelligence finding to actively seek to undermine his regime?

The President. I don't comment on those things. I can't—

Expectations of Operation Allied Force

Mr. Blitzer. I knew you wouldn't, but I figured I would ask anyhow.

Let's move on to talk about—under the category of “now the truth can be told.” When you gave the order to launch the air-strikes, did you ever believe in your wildest imagination it would take 78 days, and all the devastation that it did take, to finally declare a victory?

The President. I'll tell you what I thought. I thought that there was maybe a 50 percent chance it would be over in a week, because once he knew we would do it, I thought he would remember Bosnia, and I thought he would understand what we could do. But I knew that if he decided to take the punishment of the air campaign, it could go on quite a long while, because he would be trying all along to divide the Allies or to bring pressure from the outside to try to find some way to bring it to a close.

And so I told everybody when we started, I said, “Look, if we start this and it doesn't work out in 2 or 3 days, we've got to be prepared to go on.”

I knew that we had, because of the facts of this case, the capacity—with the sophisticated weaponry and the skill of our pilots—I knew we had the capacity to essentially take

down the military apparatus and the economic apparatus supporting it. But I knew it could take quite a long time. I didn't have any specific deadline, but I knew it could take quite a long time.

“Clinton Doctrine”

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, some of your aides are now talking about a Clinton doctrine in foreign policy in the aftermath of this war against Yugoslavia. Is there, in your mind, a Clinton doctrine?

The President. Well, I think there's an important principle here that I hope will be now upheld in the future and not just by the United States, not just by NATO, but also by the leading countries of the world, through the United Nations. And that is that while there may well be a great deal of ethnic and religious conflict in the world—some of it might break out into wars—that whether within or beyond the borders of a country, if the world community has the power to stop it, we ought to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing. People ought—innocent civilians ought not to be subject to slaughter because of their religious or ethnic or racial or tribal heritage.

That is what we did, but took too long in doing, in Bosnia. That is what we did and are doing in Kosovo. That is, frankly, what we failed to do in Rwanda, where so many died so quickly, and what I hope very much we'll be able to do in Africa if it ever happens there again.

Gun Control Legislation

Mr. Blitzer. All right. Let's move on to some domestic issues. Guns—a big subject this past week. Do you really believe it's realistic, it's appropriate to register all guns in the United States? And if that were done, would that stop the violence?

The President. Well, you asked two questions. Realistic? In this Congress, perhaps not. Appropriate? Sure. We register cars. And if we did register them, it would be easier to track sales and easier to do comprehensive background checks.

But that's not what I asked the Congress to do. All I asked the Congress to do was to close the loophole for sales at gun shows and flea markets, so we could do the same

background checks we now do at gun stores. And do I think that would make America a less violent place? Yes, I think there would be less crime with guns if that happened.

We already—under the Brady bill, we've stopped 400,000 improper sales. And we also have a 25-year low in our crime rate, and violent crime coming down, on average, even slightly more than that. So do I think violent crime would go down more? Absolutely, I do.

Mr. Blitzer. And the registration, you're going to hold off on for the time being?

The President. Yes. I mean, if we can't close the gun show loophole, we're certainly not going to pass that.

But let me ask you this—and that doesn't have anything to do with the right to keep and bear arms. We have—there's a constitutional right to travel in America, enshrined by the Supreme Court as a constitutional right. No one believes that registering our cars, or proving that we know how to drive them, undermines our constitutional right to travel. It facilitates our constitutional right to travel by making sure we're safe on the road and that we know what we're doing.

Mr. Blitzer. All right, but you will concede, though, that the Democrats have a potential political bonanza, from this defeat of the legislation this past week, going into the elections next year.

The President. Well, if the public supports this—but I didn't want a political bonanza; I wanted a safer America. And our party did not seek political points on this. We sought—if we wanted a political bonanza, we would have gone in with a bunch of issues that we knew were popular that we had no chance to pass. We thought—we went in there with an agenda that we thought we could pass, that we knew would make America a safer place.

No one questions—no one seriously questions—after the experience of the last 5 years with the Brady bill, that if we close the gun show and flea market loophole, that there will be fewer improper sales and it will make America safer at minimum disruption to the people who buy and sell guns and use them lawfully. So that's—what we've tried to do is to get things done that would make America a safer place.

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Blitzer. All right. Speaking about politics, let's talk about Presidential politics. Do you think that Texas Governor George W. Bush is qualified to be President of the United States?

The President. Well, that's a decision the American people have to make.

Mr. Blitzer. Well, what do you think?

The President. Well, I think—you know, for one thing, we've got to see where he stands on the issues. So far, we know almost nothing of that, except what we know from his record as Governor. He said—his announcement speech was very well crafted, and was strikingly reminiscent of what those of us who call ourselves New Democrats have been saying since 1991.

But on the specifics, I just don't know. I mean, for example, he said nothing about this gun battle going on in the House. He signed the concealed weapons bill in the Texas Legislature. That's just the one example.

The one thing I thought the Vice President did particularly well when he announced was to say, "I'm very proud of what we've done in the last 6½ years; I've got all the relevant experience to be President, but the important thing is, what are we going to do in the next 4 years; and here are specific things I will do." I think that Governor Bush owes it to the American people to say the same thing.

Mr. Blitzer. Well, why is Vice President Gore so far behind Governor Bush in the polls, and what does the Vice President have to do to catch up?

The President. Well, I think in historical terms, he's not particularly far behind. I think if you go back and look at this point in 1959, when candidate Richard Nixon, Vice President Richard Nixon, was going to run as the Republican nominee, he was considerably further behind Adlai Stevenson, who was the best-known Democrat at the time.

I think the American people—the encouraging thing to me is that two-thirds of them have said they want to know more about all the candidates, including the Vice President. And I believe when they look at experience, proven success, and the program for the future—most—all elections are about tomorrow—I think he's going to do very well.

Mr. Blitzer. Do you think that he was trying, this week, to distance himself from you, the Vice President, by saying, almost volunteering, that your behavior last year was inexcusable?

The President. Well, I took no offense at it. He didn't say anything that I hadn't said in much starker terms a long time ago. So there was nothing inappropriate about that.

I thought the most important thing he did, frankly, by far, was to say, "I've got experience in areas that matter, and we have succeeded; here's what I'm going to do, specifically, if you elect me; and the real choice is whether you want to build on this record of success and go beyond it, or you want to go back."

I think—keep in mind, the American people will view this election, as they should—as they should—as about them, their children, and their future. All elections are about tomorrow. So if you've been a good Vice President or a good Governor of Texas, for the voters at election time, that's only valuable if it's evidence that you'll do good tomorrow.

They hire you; they give you a check every 2 weeks to do a good job. So I thought the most important thing he did was to talk about his future vision.

Mrs. Clinton's Possible Senate Bid

Mr. Blitzer. All right, let's talk about the First Lady's potential run for the Senate from New York. When did you discover, when did you learn that the First Lady was a New York Yankees fan?

The President. Oh, when I first—shortly after I met her, because I'm a big baseball fan. I mean, I'm—

Mr. Blitzer. You know, a lot of people think she just came up—

The President. I know that. But she said how it came to be. Her primary allegiance all her life has been to the Chicago Cubs. If you go to Chicago, basically, most of the people on the north side are for the Cubs; most of the people on the south side are for the White Sox. And she said, but I also—I remember back in the seventies, we were talking about other baseball, and she said, "But I like the Yankees, too." I said, "Well,

why don't you like the White Sox?" She said, "If you're from Chicago, you're for the White Sox or the Cubs, and normally not both." So our family always liked the Yankees.

Mr. Blitzer. All right. You know, there—

The President. I learned it a long time ago.

Mr. Blitzer. —you know, there are reports out today in U.S. News and World Report that she's thinking of moving out of the White House and getting a place in New York in the fall.

The President. Well, it's not true that she's going to move out of the White House. But let me answer the report. Months ago, we said that we intended to get a place in New York. We talked—we started talking not long after we moved to the White House about where we would live when we got out. She's always wanted to live in New York, so we said we'd do that. And I would divide my time between New York and going home to Arkansas and finishing my library and doing my work there.

Now, if she runs for the Senate, she'll obviously have to spend a lot more time there. But it will be more like an incumbent Member of Congress running for reelection. That is, she's not going to stop being First Lady and doing her other responsibilities, but she'll have to spend a lot more time in New York, and we'll have to get a place there for her to be while she's spending her time there.

Mr. Blitzer. If she runs for the Senate, will you be eligible to vote for her in New York State? In other words, would you move your voting registration from Arkansas to New York?

The President. Well, I might, because I think every vote counts, and I'd certainly want her to win if she ran.

Mr. Blitzer. Could be that close?

The President. I will say this. I think if this is what she wants to do, if she wants, if she decides to do this, I will be enthusiastically supportive, because I think she would be truly magnificent. I think she'd be great for the people of New York and good for the people of America.

In all the years I've been in public life, of all the people I've ever known, she has

been the most consistently, seriously dedicated to the kinds of public issues that I think are important today: to the welfare of children, the strength of families, the future of education, quality of health care. I mean, this is something—if the people of New York chose her, they would have somebody with 30 years of unbroken, consistent, committed dedication, who knows a lot and is great with working with people. So if that's what she wants, I'm strong for it.

Mr. Blitzer. And so you're ready to move from—

The President. I'm ready to do whatever she wants. I will be—whatever the facts are about her running for the Senate, I'll be dividing my time between New York and home, because I've got a library to build; I've got a public policy center to set up; and it's a real gift I want to give my native State, and I want it to be something wonderful and good. So, I've spent quite a lot of time on it already.

President's Future After End of Term

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, you've always been someone who's looked ahead. When you look ahead to your personal life after you leave the White House, what do you see?

The President. Well, it depends in part on what Hillary does. You know, I'll probably be going to meetings of the Senate spouses club, if she decides to run. But I want to continue to be active in areas that I care a great deal about. And I think that through my library and through the public policy center, and perhaps through some other activities, I can continue to work on some of the issues of world peace and reconciliation of people across these racial and religious lines that I've devoted so much of my life to. I can continue the work at home on issues that I care a great deal about, including involving young people in public service, whether it's young people in AmeriCorps or young Americans who are interested in running for public office. I've given a lot of thought to it.

But I'll find something useful to do. I want to work hard. I'm too early—it's too early to quit work, and I'm not good enough to go on the senior golf tour. So I expect I'll have to just keep on doing what I'm doing.

Mr. Blitzer. So what—I'm hearing more of the Jimmy Carter model as opposed to a Gerald Ford model?

The President. Yes, that may just be a function of age and circumstance. I think President Carter has been the most effective former President in my lifetime and one of the three or four most important former Presidents, in his public service and the quality of his work, in the entire history of the United States. So what I would do wouldn't be exactly what he has done, but I think the model of what he has done and how he's done it is a good model for every former President who gets out who still has good health and a few years left.

Mr. Blitzer. Okay, Mr. President. I'm told we're all out of time. I want to thank you very much for joining us for this special "Late Edition" here in Cologne.

The President. This is your last trip with me, so I want to thank you for 6½ good years. Good luck.

Mr. Blitzer. Thank you very much. It's been an honor to cover you.

NOTE: The interview began at 4:27 p.m. in the Bibliotek Room at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and was videotaped for later broadcast on Cable News Network. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Serbian Patriarch Pavle, president of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church; and suspected war criminals Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic, and Zeljko (Arkan) Raznatovic, indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Yevgeniy Kiselev of Russia's NTV in Cologne

June 20, 1999

Mr. Kiselev. Mr. President, hello, and let me express my gratitude for your interview.

The President. Thank you very much. I'm glad to do it.

Russia-U.S. Relations and Russian Troops at Pristina Airport

Mr. Kiselev. And let me start with this question. For the past week and a half, relations between Russia and the West have

been complicated by the unexpected deployment of the Russian peacekeepers to Pristina. What was at the heart of the disagreement between Moscow and the West regarding Russia's participation in KFOR? How did you overcome this disagreement?

The President. Well, first of all, let me say that this entire difficulty in Kosovo has been a great test for the relationship between the United States and Russia, but it is a test, I believe, that both countries have passed—on your part, thanks to the leadership of President Yeltsin and the work that our foreign ministers and defense ministers have done, the work that Prime Minister Stepashin has done.

I don't know that there ever was much disagreement about Russian participation. I said from the beginning that I strongly felt in order for the peacekeeping force to have credibility and full impact, Russia would have to be a very important part of it. And the agreement we have reached regarding Russian involvement in terms of leadership over the airport and being involved here in three different sectors I think will enable all of us to achieve our objectives: to bring the Kosovars home in peace and security, and to make sure that the Serb minority as well as the Kosovo Albanian majority are both treated freely and fairly.

President's Meeting With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia

Mr. Kiselev. Today, Mr. President, you met with Russian President Yeltsin. What questions did you discuss, and what did you manage to agree on?

The President. First of all, we discussed Kosovo. We talked about what a difficult challenge it had been to our relationship, and we both committed to implement our agreement in good faith in a way that will, I think, reflect credit on the leadership and greatness of Russia and the Russian people, and on those of us who are working with Russia in Kosovo.

Secondly, we discussed the importance of continuing our efforts to reduce the nuclear threat and the threat of proliferation of missile technology. And we agreed to work together on that. Among other things, President Yeltsin said that he hoped that START

II would be ratified by the Duma, and that we would begin soon parallel discussions on START III to take our nuclear arsenals down even more and on the ABM Treaty.

Then, the third thing we discussed was the need to do more to try to support economic development in Russia, to get Russia qualified in the IMF program and, of course, that requires some action in the Duma. And I expressed my strong support for IMF assistance to Russia, as well as for help on the Soviet-era debt problem and some other things that can be done, I believe, to boost Russian economic prospects and help the lives of ordinary citizens in Russia, which all of us think is very, very important.

President Yeltsin's Health

Mr. Kiselev. Mr. President, let me ask you this. Both in Russia and in the West, the question of Yeltsin's health, President Yeltsin's health constantly comes up. How did you find Mr. Yeltsin today?

The President. Today he was strong, clear, alert, vigorous. He stated Russia's case very forcefully on every issue, and we did what we have done in all of our meetings—we've now had 17 meetings in the last 6½ years. We had an agenda; we reached agreements; and we committed to go forward. So I would say, today he did very, very well.

He has acknowledged from time to time that he's had some health problems, but in all of my conversations with him about Kosovo, and especially today, I found him to be alert and very much on top of his responsibilities.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Kiselev. Mr. President, let me ask you about this. NATO's operation in the Balkans has led to manifestations of anti-Western and anti-American sentiments in Russia. What are you planning to do to improve America's image in Russia's eyes, and what kind of specific concrete steps will you take to improve relations between Russia and the U.S.?

The President. Well, first, I hope that this interview will help to some extent by giving me the opportunity to clarify my country's position and our commitment to a strong, successful, democratic Russia, fully participating in world affairs and a leadership role,